

PERFORMANCE, INTENSIFICATION, AND EXPERIENCE IN JEWISH MYSTICISM

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1. Religious Mysticism as Intensification of the Inner Life

The vast and diverse literatures commonly designated as religious mysticism can be approached from at least two main different perspectives. One is to see it as a universal phenomenon in religions and to attempt to explore the common denominators of the different mystical literatures and experiences in order to describe it in order to find out the universal, or universals that recur and to define them. In many cases this approach is indebted to general psychological assumptions as to the nature of the soul and its special activities during what is described as a mystical experience as if present in all the forms of mystical experiences. This can be described as a synthetic approach, since it takes in consideration disparate literatures that are described as mystical, paying less attention to their cultural or religious contexts, and attempting at finding the major characteristics that allegedly underlie them. The other major approach to religious mysticism is to consider it first and foremost against the specific background of the various religions within which they emerge and to attempt at understanding it by taking in account the particularistic matrixes that nourished its emergence. This is a more analytic approach, and it resorts to more philological, historical, sociological and literary tools. Without using exactly the same terms I suggested above, the two approaches have been recently developed as competing alternatives in a series of collections of articles initiated and edited by Robert K. Forman¹ and Steven T. Katz, respectively.² More recently, and this time in the

¹ *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1997).

² See, especially, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978), and *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983).

specific context of Jewish material described by scholars as “Jewish mysticism”, Boaz Huss has claimed that the term “mystical” is misleading since it refers to phenomena that differ conceptually from each other and from other phenomena outside Judaism that are referred by the same term.³

In line with my proposal for an inclusive approach to the study of religion and mysticism, which strives to resort to many different methodologies,⁴ I suggest to adopt elements from both approaches (though in general I prefer the latter one), as they may sometime function as correctives to each other, and may turn, in my opinion, much more complementing than diverging, without however subscribing totally to the premises of any of the two. By assuming an experiential component of the literatures to be surveyed above, I do not assume that this element is identical in all of them but I rather assume that there are significant differences between them.⁵ To be sure: I may not be the first to attempt to do so. Gershom Scholem expressed himself sometimes in favor of a more comprehensive vision of mysticism as occurring as a third phase in the development of religion in general, after the mythical and the institutional phases, a processes that is not ascribed to any specific religion and thus functioning as a universal process in the development of religion.⁶ He also envisioned symbolism as essential for mystical language.⁷ Thus we have in his scholarship both an historical and a phenomenological universal. On the other hand, he also militated in several important instances, in favor of analyzing the mystical phenomena against their specific religious backgrounds.⁸ I am not sure that these different approaches have been presented consciously and explicitly by Scholem as being

³ “The Mystification of the Kabbalah and the Modern Construction of Jewish Mysticism,” *Pe'amim* 110 (2007), pp. 9-30 (Hebrew).

⁴ See, e.g., my *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders* (Central European University, Budapest-New York, 2005), pp. 1-13, or *Kabbalah & Eros* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2005), pp. 13-15.

⁵ See M. IDEL, “On the Language of Ecstatic Experiences in Jewish Mysticism,” M. RIEDL, T. SCHABERT (eds.): *Religions: the religious experience*, Eranos Neue Folge Nr. 14 (Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 2008), pp. 43-84.

⁶ See his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Schocken Books, New York, 1969), pp. 7-14.

⁷ See “The Name of God and the Linguistic of the Kabbala,” *Diogenes* 79 (1972), pp. 60, 62, 79; 80 (1973), pp. 165, 193.

⁸ See, e.g., *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, tr. R. Manheim (Schocken Books, New York, 1969), p. 2. See also a somewhat similar approach formulated in the context of light in Elliot R. WOLFSON, “Hermeneutics of Light in Medieval Kabbalah,” in Matthew KAPSTEIN (ed.), *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Mystical Experience* (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 2004), pp. 105-107.

complementary, and as part of a more complex methodology. Nevertheless, I think the two approaches can work together.

Let me propose a scheme for understanding a tentative convergence between the two scholarly approaches. I suggest that religious mysticism has too major components that are found, in various ways and degrees, in many of its manifestations. They are the intensification of religious life on the one hand, and the attempt to and eventually the feeling that a contact was established with a more sublime realm, widely understood as more spiritual than what happens in the religious experience of what is conceived of as being normal in a certain religion. Thus, we may speak about more general characteristics of mysticism, which differ from R. Forman's assumption as to the existence of a special cognitive level that is specifically representative of the mystical experience. On the other hand, the sort of the intensification and the nature of the contact, vary from one sort of mysticism to another, even within the same religion, and should be understood against the background of themes and ideals found in the specific religion within which the mystic operated. I assume that most of the ideals shared by the specific mystics are also shared by the specific religious structures, which host the much more limited religious events described by scholars as mystical. Thus, a performative religion will intensify the religious acts, a religion based on faith will intensify faith, a more philosophical oriented religion will emphasize the importance of the intensified acts of cognition.

From this point of view, the mystics are more fundamentally “religious” than some of the other forms of religious elites, like for example the ordinary religious establishment, which are much more concerned with preserving the prevailing social-spiritual structures. In many cases, mystics are sometimes claiming to be more “authentic” and keeping with the “original” or pristine ideals of a certain religion that have been allegedly “betrayed” or at least neglected or forgotten by present religious elites. This is the case of R. Bahia ibn Paqudah in 11th century Spain, or R. Ezra of Gerona in early 13th century, ad R. Abraham Abulafia in the 13th century. The 13th century Christian forms of mysticism, especially in Italy, with their emphasis on the importance of poverty, is a major example for this claim for renaissance of a genuine betrayed spirituality in antiquity. Their contemporaneous Jewish mystics active in Western Europe, known as the Kabbalists, also claimed to restore an ancient Jewish spirituality, forgotten or neglected by Rabbinic authorities, as it is the case of the book of the *Zohar*, attributed to a second century Rabbinic figure. Or, to put it in more sociological terms, there are strong revivalist elements in mystical thinking, practice and movements that isolate some ideals from the past, understood in new

ways to be sure, but only really in few cases of what a scholar – unlike a contemporary authority – would discern as heresy, from a theological or a phenomenological point of view.⁹

The ways adopted by those spirituals in order to restore the ancient and allegedly betrayed values are somewhat different from the more common religious practices. Poverty, itinerant life, seclusion, intense dedication to contemplation, are sorts of activities that intend to facilitate the retrieval of a spiritual experience characteristic of a pristine, ancient spiritual past. Though rarely a case of strict innovation, mystical ideals and techniques are more often a restructuring of the old with new emphases and by adding elements taken from other cultures. From the literary point of view many of the spirituals are also commentators and the vast exegetical enterprises in mystical literatures are conspicuous. In order to understand these retrieval-exegetical phenomena we must resort to philological tools that will allow us to better understand both what there was in the past and how it has been dealt with by later figures. In order to understand why they turned to such a restorative enterprise, an understanding of their immediate background is necessary and here historical and sociological tools are necessary. Even details of theology, necessary when masters of the divine things are involved, may sometimes be no more than reflections of some sociological factors.

However, the strong belief in spiritual values and the deep emotional and intellectual investment in a type of behaviour intended to actualize them, often times constitute departures from the common way of religious life. They invite a more intense spiritual life by following a more specific religious path and then having some experience as the result of it. This intensification of religious life, more than the specific of both the techniques or of the content of the experience, either restorative or new, seems to me to be a basic feature of many traditional forms of mysticism. In many cases, the intensification is described as culminating in reaching a contact with the divine realm.¹⁰ Therefore, let me repeat, the intensification of religious life on the one hand, and the contact with what

is conceived of as a spiritual sphere on the other, are two main general features of mysticism that distinguish mystical literatures from other religious ones. This is the case also in the quietistic forms of mysticism, where the efforts are directed to the state of mind which strives not to exercise their will, are in themselves an intense state of the soul. The new intensity of religious life creates what is perceived of as an alternative to what is – at least implicitly – envisioned as a more diluted form of religion, as fostered by present social structures, sometimes regarded as corrupted, and this is the reason why some tensions often emerge between mystics and establishments. Thus, cases of sectarianism, polemics, persecutions, which are conducive to extremism from the two sides, are often part of the emergence of the new spiritual ideals. In a way, mystical revivals are part of phenomena of sociological and intellectual bifurcations. This departure of ways does not mean, in my opinion, dramatic schisms, but even small divergences may attract sharp theological controversies. Not that the mystics attempted to present themselves as innovators, but any intensification generates also new emphases that are conceived of as alternatives, and thus as threats to the more common perceptions of a certain religion.

Intensification of activities by means of certain patterns of behaviour, striving to achieve spiritual experiences conceived of as being higher than the ordinary ones prevalent in a given religious environment, changes the psychosomatic system and induces forms of experiences, which may have in common with other mystical events, some characteristics. Moreover, this intensification may deautomatize the ordinary behaviour and open thus the consciousness toward other forms of experiences.¹¹ By paying a special attention to carefully described patterns of behaviour and the ensuing experiences, a shift from a theological orientation takes place. To sum up my proposal: though traditional mystics belong to their respective religious frameworks, and should be studied as such, they intensified their religious activity in order to reach stronger experiences than the regular religious ones in their religion. This intensification is a more universal characteristic, which is nevertheless applied to particularistic ways of religious behaviour. Some of these intensifications may take the form of acceleration of activities – as we

⁹ There is a possible connection with the concept of Renaissances, which I cannot address here. See my "On European Cultural Renaissances and Jewish Mysticism," *Kabbalah* 13 (2005), pp. 43-78.

¹⁰ For contact as part of the description of mysticism see the bibliography I adduced in M. IDEL, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002), pp. 15, 56, 65, 134, 477, etc., and *Ascensions on High*, p. 23 – where I connected between intensification and contact – and the bibliography in the corresponding footnotes. See also my "Adonay Sefatay Tiftah: Models of Understanding Prayer in Early Hasidism," *Kabbalah* 18 (2008), pp. 75-76, 101-102. I hope to elaborate elsewhere on the theurgy of contact, related to the ascent of the soul, and Safedian Kabbalah.

¹¹ See A. J. DEIKMANN, "Deautomatization and the Mystic Experience," in *Altered States of Consciousness*, in Ch. T. TART (ed.) (New York, 1962), p. 40 and, following him, R. E. ORENSTEIN, *The Psychology of Consciousness* (San Francisco, 1972), pp. 132-135, M. IDEL, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, tr. Jonathan Chipman (SUNY Press, Albany, 1988), pp. 82-83. See also Shahar ARZY, Moshe IDEL, Theodor LANDIS, Olaf BLANKE, "Speaking With One's Self: Autoscopic Phenomena in Writings from the Ecstatic Kabbalah," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 12 (2005), pp. 4-30.

shall see especially in the discussion of ecstatic Kabbalah – that will bring about the experiences, which differ from one religion to another or even from one individual to another in the same religion.

2. Judaism, Jewish Mysticism and Performance

From many points of view the main layers of Jewish literatures are concerned with detailed instructions dealing with the *minutiae* of religious performances, what is designated by the term *Halakhah*. The Halakhic mode of writing and behaving is a quintessential component of many forms of Judaism, and the attention paid to the performance of commandments throughout the history of Jewish literature, is paralleled by the special attention paid to those modes of actions in the mystical literatures, and even to modes of action which are not nomian, but nevertheless enter in many details as to the precise performance.¹² The “technical” nature of Judaism in all its classical forms, which stresses the centrality of punctilious performance of commandments, invited a technical mode also in the mystical interpretations of these forms. In general, the techniques developed in medieval Kabbalah rely on the scale of values informing rabbinic Judaism: the sanctity of the divine name, the study of the Torah, performance of commandments and prayer.¹³ Those topics, which will constitute the subject of the discussions below, should be understood as forms of rituals, which may be defined by their “apartness” namely their distinctness from ordinary activities, and their “scriptedness,” namely their ordered sequel of actions which makes them recognizable, to adopt a recent description of the nature of rituals. In the case of these four practices, both their distinctness and “scriptedness” are

¹² On Judaism and especially Kabbalah, as performative see, e.g., M. IDEL, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988), pp. 57, 160, 168, 172, 174, 187-189, 245, 232, IDEM, “From Structure to Performance: On the Divine Body and Human Action in the Kabbalah,” *Mishqafayim* 32 (1998), pp. 3-6 [Hebrew], *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 3, 13, 31, 60, 67, 73-74 etc., *Ascensions on High*, pp. 7, 11, 16-18, 68, 114-115, 120-121, etc., or *Enchanted Chains: Techniques and Rituals in Jewish Mysticism* (Cherub Press, Los Angeles, 2005), pp. 33-34, 47, etc. For some aspects of Kabbalah I refer to as “ergetic,” namely as related to learning by doing see my *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1990). See also Abraham ELKAYAM, “Between Referentialism and Performativism: Two Approaches in Understanding the Kabbalistic Symbol,” *Daat* 24 (1990), pp. 5-40 (Hebrew).

¹³ See M. IDEL, *Enchanted Chains*, pp. 34-35, where I discussed these issues in a slightly different form.

conspicuous. When performed as linguistic rituals they are not only performed in Hebrew, a language that is not the vernacular of most of the authors to be discussed below, but they are quite fixed and their activation breaks the course of the ordinary life by the sanctity attributed to their performance. If this distinctness is obvious in most of the forms of Judaism, it is even more intensified in the Jewish mystical literatures, which emphasized the belief of their efficacy and thus put a special emphasis on their punctilious performance.

Such a “technical” approach to understanding Jewish mysticism as reflecting a deep structure characteristic of most important phases of Judaism, may invite the resort to other methodologies, less oriented toward theology but taking into account much more linguistics and psychology. A religion, or a certain type of mysticism, may include extreme experiences and expressions not only because some phrases are used – though the occurrence of such phrases is indubitably an important fact to be taken into account – but also if scholars are able to detect circumstantial factors than contrive to ensure the occurrence of the extreme experiences. Perhaps the recurrence of oblique indications, like the existence of techniques to return from an extreme mystical experience, or descriptions of bodily symptoms related to a certain experience, are as important as, or even more than the theological criteria.¹⁴ The difference between the theological versus the technical approach implies more than methods to deal with the role of an imponderable experience as part of the more general understanding of a certain form of mysticism. It assumes another dynamics that is formative of religious experience, especially in the case of mysticism: less depending upon the nature of a reigning theology, on authority, on abstract ideas, mysticism will be conceived as reaching its peak in extreme experiences if it will develop ways of reiterating these ideal experiences and transmitting them as ideals. I can imagine that for a mystic who have undergone extreme mystical experience will be more ready to write about techniques to retrieve these experiences, the esoteric nature of his lore will become less important, and that he may attempt to impart his strong formative experience with others.

The different forms of mysticism should, therefore, be examined not only with the eye open to theological claims available and acceptable in a certain environment, but mainly by explicating their abstract tenets by resorting preeminently to semiotic, literary, anthropological, psychological or neurological methods of investigation. This means also a

¹⁴ See also M. IDEL, “On the Theologization of Kabbalah in Modern Scholarship,” in Y. SCHWARTZ and V. KRECH (eds.), *Religious Apologetics – Philosophical Argumentation* (Mohr, Tübingen, 2004), pp. 123-174.

certain restructuring of the corpora of mystical literature that will attract the attention of the scholars: so, for example, in lieu of expatiating upon the nature of divine attributes or upon the emanative processes, the scholars of Jewish mysticism should inspect the large literature dealing with mystical rationales for the commandments or handbooks dealing with techniques to achieve mystical experiences, some of them being still extant in manuscripts. So, for example, some of the more technical Kabbalistic treatises are still in manuscripts and major issues related to experiential aspects were treated only more recently.¹⁵

3. *Halakhah, Nomos and Theosophical-Theurgical Kabbalah*

As seen above, Judaism can be defined as a Halakhocentric religion. This means that the religious life has been guided by detailed instructions which specify the specific manner in which biblical and other commandments should be performed. However, the main line of Kabbalah, which I describe as the theosophical-theurgical one, was faithful, by and large, to the rabbinic religiosity, and much of the literature belonging to this school consists in voluminous commentaries of the meaning of the commandments. Their performance was conceived of as part and parcel of this sort of Kabbalah, and by and large those Kabbalists performed exactly the same commandments as all the other Jews did. Moreover, their performance took commonly place in a certain quorum of at least ten persons, *minyan*, and were synchronized with the performance of the other participants. What is therefore the meaning of intensification or acceleration in such an instance? The answer is simple: while the corporeal aspects of performance remained the same, the intellectual and emotional dimensions of the commandments were heightened, and acceleration is related to the intensification of those additional spiritual aspects that accompany the bodily performance. In this main Kabbalistic school intensification is achieved by introducing a complex theosophical superstructure that, according to these Kabbalists, corresponds to the entire realm of Jewish rituals. This correspondence

¹⁵ See M. IDEL, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 27-29; IDEM, "Kavvanah and Colors: A Neglected Kabbalistic Responsum," in M. IDEL, D. DIMANT, S. ROSENBERG (eds.), *Tribute to Sara: Studies in Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah Presented to Professor Sara O. Heller Willensky* (Jerusalem, The Magnes Press, 1994), pp. 1-2 (Hebrew); IDEM, *Enchanted Chains*, *passim*. For the importance of the experiential aspects in Kabbalah see also the views of Yehuda LIEBES, "New Directions in the Study of Kabbalah," *Pe'amim* 50 (1992), pp. 150-170 (Hebrew), and Elliot WOLFSON, *Through a Speculum that Shines* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995), *passim*.

between the various rituals and their details, and the theosophical superstructure takes several forms but the most important one is the assumption that the human performance is intended to affect the structure of the divine powers on high. Such a performance is imagined to be necessary for the maintenance of the harmonious relationship between the divine powers, that is affected by the human religious actions, an effect that I designate as *theurgy*, a term that I use in order to point to the impact of the performance of the ritual on the divine powers.¹⁶ It should be pointed out that the theosophical system has been repeatedly described in anthropomorphic terms, and that the rabbinic commandments have been envisioned as corresponding to one of the divine powers that constitute the divine anthropos. Though so different from each other the bodily performance and the spiritual processes, are totally concomitant. For a Kabbalist belonging to this school, the spiritual processes are meaningless if not accompanied by the bodily acts, and again for such Kabbalists, the bodily performances are rather inferior religious acts if not accompanied by spiritual intentions. The encounter between the divine and the human takes place during this type of combined activity. No passivity is imaginable as religiously significant in this type of Kabbalah, and religious acts are quintessential for an encounter with God.

The existence of a precise temporary framework, namely the time of the performance of the commandments, which Kabbalists did together with and simultaneous to other Jews, created a need for accelerating the inner processes, the *Kavvanah*, characteristic to them alone. This does not mean that the Kabbalists did not deal also with practices known in other forms of mysticism as meditation or contemplation. Those practices are not limited in time, and are practiced whenever the mystic is willing to do so. The Kabbalists, who did not separate from their community and in many cases functioned as its leaders, had to comply, by and large, with the ordinary religious timetable. This does not mean that a Kabbalist did not have to undergo periods of exercises, during which he might have to dedicate himself to the study of the structure of the divine realm in itself, and to the understanding the detailed correspondences between the bodily deeds –

¹⁶ See M. IDEL, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 173-199, Charles MOPSIK, *Les Grands textes de la Cabale, Les Rites qui Font Dieu* (Verdier, Lagrasse, 1993), Yair LORBERBAUM, *Image of God, Halakhah and Aggadah* (Schocken, Tel Aviv, 2004) (Hebrew), Jonathan GARB, *Manifestations of Power in Jewish Mysticism from Rabbinic Literature to Safed Kabbalah* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2004) (Hebrew), Elliot WOLFSON, "Mystical-Theurgical Dimensions of Prayer in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*," *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, vol. III (1988), pp. 41-80, and Iris FELIX, *Theurgy, Magic, and Mysticism in the Kabbalah of R. Joseph of Shushan* (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2005) (Hebrew).

the commandments – and the supernal powers. Or, in other words, we may presuppose a period in which the details of both theosophy and theurgy were studied in preparation for their application during the performance of the commandments. However, these periods should be seen basically as preparations, done in anticipation of the ritual performances, which were considered to be “the thing itself”. To what extent such periods of study are similar to what is denoted by the terms meditation or contemplation, is a matter I cannot engage here.

Or, to formulate this situation in other words: the spiritual performance that accompanies the bodily one is certainly more subjective and idiosyncratic, but it must be accomplished during the collective time of the ritual. Or to formulate it in other terms: halakhic time, which regulates the performance of many rituals, especially the liturgical ones, is also the time that regulates the performances of the Kabbalists, including their spiritual acts that accompany the bodily acts. It is neither the spontaneity of the divine grace that generates the moment of encounter, or the mystical experience, nor the free initiative of the mystic, but the rhythm of religious life as regulated by a non-mystical body of writings, the *Halakhah*. Though there are some few cosmic elements in this rhythm, like the special times of prayers, in the morning, afternoon and evening, or the cyclical time of the Sabbath and the holidays, by and large the Halakhic time is not colored by a connection to cosmic rhythms. Even more so when we remember that the fundamentals of *Halakhah* have been established in the land of Israel and in Babylonia, while most of the Jewish mystical literature has been written elsewhere, where other seasons were dominant and agriculture was no more a vital profession of Jews. The basic rhythm is more related to the communal life. Thus, though the Kabbalists added their spiritual performances to those done also by community, the rhythm of their spiritual life, at least insofar as the issue of *Kavannah* was concerned, remained dependent on the cyclical rhythm of *Halakhah*.

This presentation means that the time Kabbalists had at their disposition for both their bodily and the spiritual performances was identical with that which their coreligionists performed the same commandments the Kabbalists did. Therefore, they had to accelerate the mental activity related to their performance in order to keep their performance in path with the other. It is only much later, since the mid-18th century, that we know about Kabbalists living together in a separate group, sharing in an egalitarian manner the fruit of their spiritual achievements, and then they also prayed together without having to synchronize their prayer with other non-Kabbalist Jews. However, this development included quite a complex system of prayer, which demands

an even more intense type of spiritual processes, because of the dramatic complexity of the late Lurianic theosophical system.

To be sure: this mode of simultaneous performances requires a concentration of attention to the details of both the bodily and the spiritual events. Kabbalists adopted a philosophical term in order to convey this requirement of mental concentration, commonly designated as *hitbodedut*.¹⁷ However, this concentration differs from the restriction the entire consciousness to a certain static point, as found in many forms of mysticism. The divine structure on Kabbalistic theosophy is not only complex, but also very dynamic, and we shall return to this point later on.

How are these affinities between a transcendental complex deity and the human performer imagined by a Kabbalist? Answers differ from one trend of theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah to another. Let me adduce a passage from a major Kabbalistic book, written by one of the most systematic and influential Kabbalists ever, the mid-16th century R. Moses Cordovero of Safed:

“The man upon whom his Creator has bestowed the grace of entering the inner aspect of the occult lore¹⁸ knows and understands that by reciting *Barekh 'Aleinu* [Bless us] and *Refa'enu* [Heal us] the purpose is to draw down the blessing and the influx by each and every blessing to a certain *sefirah*, and the blessing of *Refa'enu* to a certain *sefirah*, as is known to us. Behold, this man is worshipping the Holy One, blessed be He and his *Shekhinah* as a son and a servant standing before his master, by means of perfect worship, out of love, without deriving any benefit or reward from this worship (...) because the wise man [namely the Kabbalist] by the quality of his [mystical] intention [*kavvanah*] which he intends during his prayer, his soul will be elevated by his [spiritual] arousal from one degree to another, from one entity to another¹⁹ until she arrives and is welcome and comes in the presence of the Creator, and cleaves to her source, to the source of life; and then a great influx will be emanated upon her from there, and he will become a vessel²⁰ and a place and foundation for [that] influx, and from him it [the influx] will be distributed²¹ (...) until the

¹⁷ M. IDEL, “*Hitbodedut* as Concentration in Jewish Philosophy,” in M. IDEL, Zeev W. HARVEY, E. SCHWEID (eds.), *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His Eighteenth Birthday* (Jerusalem, 1988), vol. I, pp. 39-60 (Hebrew).

¹⁸ I.e., Kabbalah.

¹⁹ The Hebrew term translated as “entity” is *sibbah*. Cordovero mentions here also the ascent from one *'Illah* another term for cause, to another. The expression of ascending from one degree, or gradation to another, became a recurring topos in Hasidism.

²⁰ *Keli*. This term is absent in Cordovero's version of this passage though it occurs elsewhere in Cordovero's writings.

²¹ *Yithalleq*. Another pertinent translation is “will be divided.”

Shekhinah will cleave to him (...) and you will be a seat to Her and [then] the influx will descend on you²² (...) because you replace the great conduit in the place of the *Tzaddiq*, the foundation of the world.”²³

This is quite a representative passage, since it constitutes a continuation of a very important theory regarding communion with God by an authoritative Kabbalist, Nahmanides²⁴, where there is the double type of contact, one by ascent and adherence the other by the descent of the divine upon the body of the mystic, and it reverberated in several Kabbalistic writings and in Hasidism. For the present discussion the concept that the mystic becomes a seat of the dwelling of the divine is important since it points to the importance of human body. To be sure this is not a new idea as it received a special status in many discussions in Jewish texts long before Cordovero: the human body was conceived of as a temple or chariot for the descent of the divine powers.²⁵

The above passage deals with the recitation of two liturgical formulas, or blessings, *Barekh 'Aleinu* and *Refa'enu* that are part of the most well-known Jewish prayer, the Eighteen Blessing, recited by every traditional Jew three times every day. During their loud recitation, a Kabbalist imagines that he is capable of drawing down divine power from a higher divine realm to lower divine potencies named *Sefirot*. This

²² Compare also to *Pardes Rimmonim* XXII:3.

²³ I translate the version as found in R. Abraham Azulai, *Massekhet 'Avot* (Jerusalem, 1986), fol. 3a. Emphases added. An interesting parallel is found in *'Or Yaqar*, vol. 12, p. 42. I prefer to analyze this version, because it has some formulations that synthesize Cordovero's views. The issue of the human limbs as seat recurs in Cordovero. See *'Or Yaqar*, vol. 8, p. 116. For the vision of the souls as transmitting the influx and light from the supernal to the lower world see *ibid.*, vol. 12, p. 44.

²⁴ See Adam AFTERMAN, *Intimate Conjunction with God: The Concept of 'Devekut' in the Early Kabbalah* (Ph. D. Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 2008), pp. 297-332 (Hebrew). The origin of Nahmanides' view is found already in R. Yehudah ha-Levi, see Diana LOBEL, "A dwelling place for the *Shekhinah*," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 90 (1999), pp. 103-125.

²⁵ See Michael FISHBANE, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003), p. 247-249; Micheline CHAZE, "De l'identification des Patriarches au char divin : recherches du sens d'un enseignement rabbinique dans le Midrash et dans la Kabbale prézoharique et ses sources," *Revue des Études Juives* 149 (1990), pp. 5-75; Michael SCHNEIDER, *The Appearance of the High Priest, Theophany, Apotheosis and Binitarian Theology From Priestly Tradition of the Second Temple Period through Ancient Jewish Mysticism* (Ph. D Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 2008), pp. 77-78 (Hebrew), and Ron MARGOLIN, *The Human Temple* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2005) (Hebrew).

operation is one form of theurgy. The Kabbalist is an expert in generating some forms of circulation of divine energy, within the divine realm. However, the event described in this passage is not only a matter of causing the descent of energy within the theosophical system, but also the creation of a continuum between the divine world and the lower world, by seeing in the body of the Kabbalist a pipe that transmits the divine energy to this world. This aspect can be described as a magical perception. However, in addition to the theurgical and the magical aspects, there are also emotional and ascensional elements involved in the operation of the Kabbalist: he should worship God out of love, and cause the ascent of his soul to a higher divine realm, and cleave there in some form of mystical union, an act that triggers the descent of energy. Here we have an example of what I propose to call the theurgy of contact, since the theurgical impact is achieved by the arrival of the human soul, or in other cases, intention, on high. The intimacy with the divine is evident in the claim that the true worshiper can worship God as a son.²⁶ All this should happen during the recitation of two relatively short prayers. This passage is a fine example of what I call the mystical-magical model that recurs in different forms in Kabbalah and Hasidism.²⁷ It constitutes a variant of a much more comprehensive myth, described by Arnold van Gennep and adopted in Joseph Campbell's view about the mono-myth.²⁸

Let me point out that the divine grace mentioned at the beginning of this passage has to do with the divine allowing someone to study Kabbalah, but it has nothing to do with the divine intervention during the Kabbalistic performance of the recitation of the liturgical pieces. In any case Cordovero speaks about the "continuous perseverance" – *ha-sheqidah ha-temidit* – related to the study of the Torah as some form of imitation of the famous R. Shimeon bar Yohai, the alleged author of the *Zohar*. The perseverance is imagined to induce the supernal continuous union – *ha-Yihud ha-temidi* – between the male and female potencies, and those will dwell continuously with the mystics – *ha-shekhinah ha-temidit* – thus establishing some form of strong relationship between intensification and the subsequent contact.²⁹

We may discern a density of events that is the result of various spiritual acts that should take place during the pronouncement of the

²⁶ On this issue see M. IDEL, *BEN: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism* (Continuum, London-New York, 2008), *passim*.

²⁷ See M. IDEL, *Hasidism: Between Mysticism and Magic* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1995), pp. 45-145.

²⁸ See Joseph CAMPBELL, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 30.

²⁹ *'Or Yaqar*, vol. 12, p. 43. More on the Gestalt-coherence between techniques and experiences see my *Enchanted Chains*, *passim*.

Kabbalists alone. However, there is a certain split in consciousness that is divided between the bodily performance and the spiritual one, in most of the cases Kabbalists would envision some form of synergesis. It is not only a matter of simultaneity of the two forms of performance, and the synchronization of the Kabbalists' performance with that of the communal ritual, but also a vision that the two forms of performance are converging on the same divine realm.

Performance of rituals is indeed a matter of obedience, and a reiteration of regimen vitae already in existence. It is hard to speak in Judaism about a central role of spontaneity of religious behaviour, though such moments are not totally absent, especially later on in East European Hasidism. However, the more inventive aspects of Jewish mysticism have to do more with the details of the spiritual intention, which can hardly be repeated even by the same person. From this point of view Kabbalists are rather close to Jewish philosophers, who introduced another spiritual superstructure that allowed them some form of intellectual freedom, while performing the Halakhic way of life.

Let me address now the question of how did some Kabbalists envision the efficacy of their ritualistic performance. One of the early Kabbalists, R. Ezra of Gerona, offers an answer to such a question. In his *Commentary on the Talmudic 'Aggadot* there is a seminal passage based too on the theurgy of contact, where it is asserted:

"You should know that man comprises all the spiritual entities,³¹ and his intellectual soul is superior to all. This is the reason why the Torah and the *Mitzvah* come to deter man and warn him that all the ways of man [*darkhei ha-'adam*] are in his power, because within him there is a thing superior to all (...) Like the perfect righteous who is crowning his Creator by crowns³², by the means of *devequt* he is causing his soul to cleave to its source³³ and [then] he causes the emanation of the blessing just as someone kindles one candle³⁴ from another, and he holds³⁵ and settles and adds³⁶. The wicked person is doing the opposite."³⁷

³¹ *ha-devarim ha-Ruhaniyyim*. This phrase points in early Kabbalistic texts to the ten sefirot, see M. IDEL, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 43, 290-291, n. 29-30. For the use of this concept see M. IDEL, *ibid.*, pp. 191-197.

³³ *Meqom motza'ah*. This phrase occurs in several Geronese sources. See the discussion of Gershon SCHOLEM, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, R. J. Zwi WERBLOWSKY (ed.), tr. Allan Arkush (Princeton University Press, Princeton, JPS, 1987) pp. 299-304; M. IDEL, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 52, 293 n. 64, Haviva PEDAYA, *Vision and Speech: Models of Revelatory Experience in Jewish Mysticism* (Cherub Press, Los Angeles 2001), pp. 140-207; and J. A. APTHEIMER, *Intimate Conjunction with God*, pp. 196-197, 263.

³⁴ The term translated as candle is *NER*. The assumption is that the descending emanation does not create a diminution of energy in the divine source. Here like

Like in the case of Cordovero, the mystical ideal of adhering or being united with God is not an end in itself. In sharp distinction from the individual attainments of the person who performs only the sensory rite, the mystical state, apparently higher than the achievement of the splendor of the soul, was put in the service of theurgic achievements. The return of the soul to its source, which is, in theosophical terms, a very high place in the sefirotic realm, is the starting point for a theurgical operation, represented here by the causing of the emanation of the blessing. We may assume that the return to the source is more than a realization of nostalgia for origins: It presumably involves also a more energized state of being for the mystic, which is expressed by the series of verbs that follows the cleaving of the soul to the source. The whole operation is possible, as this Kabbalist explicitly indicates, due to the precise parallelism or isomorphism between the two planes; the human body reflects the theosophical structure and his soul stems from a very high place. Thus, in addition to the theurgy of contact we have here also some form of sympathetic relationship between the human and the divine realm, which allows an impact of the former on the latter. Although the concept of *mitzvah* appears here explicitly, this is not the main occurrence of the idea of the ritual. In my opinion it is implicit in the very idea of the perfect righteous, a concept that is meaningless without assuming a preliminary ritualistic perfection. Moreover, the coronation of the king is closely related to ritualistic, i.e., liturgical, processes.³⁵ The concept of adding something on high is also part of the Rabbinic understanding of the "performance of the will of God", namely the compliance with system of the commandments. In these texts, the theurgical operation seems to be effective without the assumption of the existence of a complex theosophical superstructure. Moreover, this theurgical effect could, in principle, be attained by both the masses and the elite. However, a great change seems to have taken place in the Kabbalistic treatment of this issue. The operator now is not the upright or simply a righteous person.

in many other instances in theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, the candle is a symbol for a hypostatic divine power. Compare our discussion below where the candle is an allegory for the human, and thus an inferior, entity.

³⁵ *Ma'amid*. This is the verb used also in the quote of R. Ezra adduced above.

³⁶ *Mosif*. This verb occurs in the Rabbinic literature in the context of adding power on the high. See M. IDEL, *Kabbalah, New Perspectives*, pp. 157-166.

³⁷ Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1947, fol. 26b, and Ms. Vatican 202, fols. 54a-54b. See also M. IDEL, "Some Remarks on Ritual, Mysticism, and Kabbalah in Gerone," *Journal for Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1993), pp. 111-113.

³⁸ See Arthur GREEN, *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1997).

He is the perfect righteous, *ha-tzaddiq ha-shalem*; his activity involves *devequt* as a first stage and theurgy as a later one.

A somewhat similar sequence is found elsewhere in R. Ezra, again in connection to the *tzaddiq*; after the definition of man as constituted by the supernal things, namely both his soul and body, the righteous is described as causing his soul to ascend and be unified in a mystical union with the supernal soul, in the Neoplatonic sense of the concept, and only then he is able to know future things.³⁹ Thus, the theurgical attainments are reserved for the elite; only the perfect righteous is able to perform the rite in a symbolic-theurgical manner. In the main forms of theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah the commandments are conceived also as a means to adhere to God, and a pseudo-etymology of the plural *mitzwot*, is asserting that it stems from *tzewet*, to be a unit or to be together, with means for the Kabbalist to be united to God.

Let me briefly draw attention to a recurring theme in theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah since late 13th century: the assumption that a human limb sustains or holds or strengthen a supernal limb. This approach has been addressed in several instances in scholarship, but it is worthwhile to be adduced also in this specific context.⁴⁰ Though this parallelism is expressed in more structural correspondences between the human and the divine limbs, it is conspicuous that the functional affinities are quintessential: this means that the performance done the human limbs has an impact on the status of the divine limbs, which entails some form of responsibility for the status of the supernal limbs. According to the early 14th century Italian Kabbalist R. Menahem Recanati, "each commandment is a branch and limb of the Supernal Form, so that by the completion of the entire Torah the Supernal Man is completed, as each and every *sefirah* of the ten *sefirot* (...) make, by being linked [together], one form."⁴¹ Following him to a certain extent, the late 15th century

³⁹ See the text translated by Gershom G. SCHOLEM, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (Schocken Books, New York, 1991), p. 49; IDEM, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 304-305. See also M. IDEL, *Kabbalah, New Perspectives*, pp. 42-43. See also *ibid.*, p. 44 where another example of the connection between *Tzaddiq*, ascent of the soul and cleaving is adduced from *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohit*. On the *Tzaddiq* in R. Isaac Sagi-Nahor' thought see G. SCHOLEM, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 291, 303.

⁴⁰ See M. IDEL, *Absorbing Perceptions*, pp. 72-74, *Enchanted Chains*, pp. 134-145 and I. FELIX, *Theurgy, Magic, and Mysticism in the Kabbalah of R. Joseph of Shushan*, pp. 37-143.

⁴¹ *Commentary on the Torah* (Jerusalem, 1960), fol. 23bc, and ibn Gabbai, *'Avodat ha-Qodesh* (Jerusalem, 1963), part III, ch. 69, fol. 112bc discussed in Moshe IDEL, "The Concept of the Torah in Heikhalot Literature and Its

Spanish Kabbalist R. Yehudah Hayyat, wrote in his *Minhat Yehudah* (a commentary on the anonymous early 14th century classic of Kabbalistic literature *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*) he composed in Mantua:

"Man makes a strong impression [*roshem*] on high by each and every step that he takes here below either by a good or a bad deed. This happens because he is created from the supernal entities in the image of God, and this image connects him with his God like an iron chain which descends from above downward since when the lowest rung is moved here below, also the highest among them will be moved. And the commandments [stem] from the ten *sefirot* and when someone performs a commandment below it is as if he causes the emanation of power on the supernal form on high by means of the pipes of thought⁴² onto that attribute [namely *sefirah*] that points to that commandment, and then the supernal entities will be blessed because of the lower ones."⁴³

The formal correspondence between the two images makes it possible to influence the higher by the lower. Ritual is expressly understood as the dynamic aspect of the relationship between the lower and the higher: the image shows the effect from higher to lower but the action is from the lower to the higher [entities]. This action may be related to the reference to the iron chain, since immediately before this passage the influence of the iron-stone on iron is mentioned in order to illustrate the possibility of creating movement in an object located at a distance. Thus, we have here a combination of the sympathetic theurgy with the concept of the great chain of being, instead of the theurgy of contact.

One of the most influential expressions of this view is found in R. Meir ibn Gabbai, a famous early 16th century Kabbalist active in the Ottoman Empire, who envisioned the Torah as isomorphic to both God and man, and serving as an intermediate entity:

"The Torah is, therefore, the wholeness [*kelal*] of the grand and supernal Anthropos, and this is the reason why it comprises the 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments which are tantamount to the number of the limbs and sinews of the lower and supernal man (...) and since the Torah has the shape of man it is fitting to be given to man,

Metamorphoses in Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981), pp. 68-70 (Hebrew).

⁴² *Tzinorot ha-Mahashavah*, namely of the *sefirah* of *Keter*.

⁴³ Printed in *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut* (Mantua, 1558), fols. 161b-162a. On theurgy in Hayyat see Ch. MOPSIK, *Les grands textes*, pp. 341-345, and 350-352 for a French translation and analysis of this passage.

and man is man by virtue of it, and in the end he will cleave to [the supernal] Man."⁴⁴

The Torah teaches, according to this view, the correspondences between the lower and higher limbs, and their activation is part of the process of cleaving to God, creating therefore a synthesis of the theurgy of sympathy based on isomorphism, and a theurgy of contact. Thus, the Torah becomes an intermediary man, a meso-anthropos: "The intermediary which stirs the supernal image towards the lower one,"⁴⁵ or, according to another passage: "the Torah and the commandments are the intermediary, which link the lower image to the supernal one, by the affinity they have with both."⁴⁶ These quotes are simply examples of Kabbalistic treatments of the Torah as the image or icon of God, or in some other cases, as his embodiment. Other examples can be found in later Kabbalistic sources, and some have been analyzed elsewhere.⁴⁷ By pointing to the correspondences, the feeling of a broader context, involving the divine sphere, with the responsibility for its well-being, intensifies religious life.

However, there are also examples where the concept of the lower human body, as influential on or even as the origin, in comparison to the higher described as a shadow, makes room for a different one, in which the supernal is conceived to be the "original". So, for example, an important Italian Kabbalist said:

"The *Partzufim* of the divine system consist of the spirituality of the letters of the Torah, and therefore all the names of the limbs of the human body mentioned therein are their true names [...] but in us these names are derived because, according to the powers we receive from them, we give names to the physical limbs of our body which carry out actions with the

⁴⁴ *'Avodat ha-Qodesh*, fol. 20c. For a vision of reality as being continuous, according to this book see also *ibid.*, fols. 11c-12b. See also M. IDEL, "The Concept of the Torah," pp. 74-75, and R. Isaac Aizic Yehudah Safran of Komarno, *Zohar Hai* (Lemberg, rpr. Israel, 1971), vol. I, fol. 5c.

⁴⁵ *'Avodat ha-Qodesh*, fol. 36d. See also R. Isaac Haver, *Siyah Yitzhaq*, ed. Jonathan ben MEIR (Jerusalem, 2000), pp. 188-189, 195, 200.

⁴⁶ *'Avodat ha-Qodesh*, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ See M. IDEL, "The Concept of the Torah," pp. 76-83, IDEM, "Torah: Between Presence and Representation of the Divine in Jewish Mysticism," in Jan ASSMANN, Albert I. BAUMGARTEN (eds.), *Representation in Religion, Studies in Honor of Moshe Barasch* (Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2001), pp. 197-236, and M. IDEL, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 69-74.

help of this power in the name of the divine source through which the energy runs."⁴⁸

For the point I would like to make here the explanation why the human actions, meaning commandments, are effective is less important than the feeling that for the Kabbalist they are even when man is described as the lower reproduction of the higher. For another energetic vision of the commandments we read in one of R. Hayyim Vital's Lurianic writings, though presumably influenced by Cordovero's view cited above:

"Know that the power of the angel that is made out of the Torah [that is studied] is greater than those [powers] emerging from man's [performance of] the commandment, and this is the secret of the angels telling [*ha-mal'akhim ha-maggidim*] to men and announcing to them the future things and hidden secrets. Those [angels] are made out of the Torah and the commandment [performed by] man."⁴⁹

The angel is conceived of as growing out of the ritual operations of the mystic. Either by his studying the Torah or by performing commandments, the Jewish mystic is conceived of as creating his own angel, which then reveals to him matters of ethics and religion. To be sure; this is not a common angelic revelation; the angel is here conceived as a reification of a human intense religious activity, which takes an "objective" status and then interacts with the mystic.⁵⁰ In any case, the intense study of the Torah is imagined to create an angel that is revealing itself to the student, some form of contact, as mentioned above.

By and large, we can describe the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah as an extended effort to supply theosophical myths to enhance

the significance and efficacy of rabbinic rituals, that have only rarely been associated with each other beforehand. However, while the different theosophies and theurgies passed in accordance to the various Kabbalistic schools, the performative basis of Kabbalah remained rather stable, given the undisputed importance of the commandments. I have adduced above a series of seems to me to be representative passages as to the main school of Kabbalah. They reflect the concatenation between ritual acts, performed together with other Jews who were not Kabbalists, while at the same time contemplating a theosophical realm that was conceived of as dynamic and interactive, these processes depending much on the performance of the rituals. Intensification means in those cases not another rhythm of performing the sensory pole of the commandments, but adding the theosophical superstructures, which should be contemplated and affected. Responsibility for the well-being of the divine structure, and indirectly also for the repercussions those acts have on the energetic situation in the world, affected by the divine realm, add some sense of intense religious life.

Let me turn now to another example for an intense religious life that has as a consequence the angelification of the aspirant. R. Isaac ben Samuel of Acre, active at the end of the 13th century and early 14th century, reports a tradition he received from an Ashkenazi master named R. Yehudah Ashkenazi ha-Darshan [namely the Homilist]:

"He said that he received that Enoch was a shoemaker, namely a cobbler, and with each and every wrinkle he smoothed in the leather by the tool he was blessing with all his heart and a complete Kavannah, the Holy One, blessed be He, and he was drawing down the blessing⁵¹ to the emanated Metatron⁵², and he never forgot to bless even in the case of one hole, but he was always doing so, thus out of his great love he was no [more]⁵³ since God took him and he merited to be designated as [the angel] Metatron⁵⁴, and his rank was very high."⁵⁵

⁴⁸ R. Immanuel Hai Rikki, *Mishnat Hasidim*, quoted in M. IDEL, *Old Worlds, New Mirrors, On Jewish Mysticism and Twentieth-Century Thought* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, forthcoming 2010), p. 165.

⁴⁹ *Sefer ha-Gilgulim* (Vilnius 1886), fol. 60ab, and R. Abraham Azulai, *Hesed le-'Avraham* (Lemberg, 1863), fol. 15a. The Kabbalistic trend from which the Maggid-phenomena emerged is related to forms of Hermeticism, as pointed out by Shlomo PINES, "Le *Sefer ha-Tamar* et les *Maggidim* des Kabbalistes," in G. NAHON, Ch. TOUATI (eds.), *Hommage à Georges Vajda* (Peeters, Louvain, 1980), pp. 333-363.

⁵⁰ R. J. Zwi WERBLOWSKY, *Joseph Karo, Lawyer and Mystic* (JPS, Philadelphia 1977), pp. 109-111, 272-274, and Lawrence FINE, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos, Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2003), pp. 294-295, IDEM, "Recitation of *Mishnah* as a Vehicle for Mystical Inspiration: A Contemplative Technique Taught by Hayyim Vital," *Revue des Études Juives* 141 (1982), pp. 183-199.

⁵¹ Namely the influx from the higher sefirot upon the lowest one.

⁵² In R. Isaac of Acre's theosophical system this phrase points to the divine feminine power of *Malkhut*.

⁵³ Cf. *Genesis* 5:24.

⁵⁴ Namely the created Metatron, which is an angel, unlike the emanated one, which is divine. This distinction and the terminology used to refer to it is characteristic of R. Isaac of Acre's writings, and may help us identify anonymous fragments as him as author. On Metatron in R. Isaac's thought see also now Eithan FISHANE, *As Light Before Dawn: The Inner World of a Medieval Kabbalist* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2009), pp. 280-282.

⁵⁵ *Me'irat 'Einayim*, ed. Amos GOLDBREICH (Jerusalem, 1984), p. 47. On this legend and its reverberations see Moshe IDEL, "Enoch – The Mystical Cobbler," *Kabbalah* 5 (2000), pp. 265-286 (Hebrew). For the earlier parallels to this legend

It is hard to know from whom did R. Yehudah Ashkenazi receive this tradition, and in any case, I assume that the passage is strongly coloured by R. Isaac of Acre's own theosophical views. For the purpose of the present study it is essential to point out that R. Isaac describes a humble form of activity, which has nothing to do with the *nomos* of his community: nowhere has Rabbinic tradition recommended to bless God on occasions that are not related to precise deeds or moments specified in Rabbinic regulations. Here, however, the devotional performance of the mundane act of preparing shoes was transformed in some form of intensified religious life, which culminates in an angelification of Enoch. Let me point out that this is not just a legend told by just one esoteric master to another. It recurs in several Kabbalistic books, including classics of Kabbalah like Cordovero's *Pardes Rimmonim*, and it informed the development of worship in corporeality in 18th century Hasidism. While this is a diurnal anomian practice, we shall mention also the emergence of a strong interest in nocturnal events among the Safedian Kabbalists, some of them, like the ascent of the soul on high, quite anomian. No doubt, this addition of the nocturnal Kabbalistic life contributed to the intensification of religious life in the Galilean town.

Phenomenologically speaking the situation described here is parallel to the structure mentioned above: a bodily activity is performed while a spiritual act accompanies it, and adds an extra religious meaning. However, the act of preparing shoes has nothing specifically religious, and the extreme devotion mentioned in this context can be projected on any other activity. The intention is, therefore, an act that may intensify religious life, thus generating the spiritual attainment. I would describe this expansion of the spectrum of bodily acts that may acquire religious significance as hypernomian, a category that will be discussed later on when dealing with Hasidism. Therefore, keeping in mind the divinity and blessing on every move, turn into a type of behaviour that is described as higher even than the nomian one.

4. Intensification as Acceleration and as Conducive to Prophecy

While the Halakhic approach strives to maintain the existing order of the community by performing the *nomos* that keeps the individuals together as a significant religious unit, the quest for extraordinary individual and elite experiences, invites the shaping of new

see the important contribution of Michael SCHNEIDER, "Enoch the Cobbler and the Muslim Tradition," *Kabbalah* 6 (2001), pp. 287-319 (Hebrew).

forms of activities that will bring about those types of experiences. In some cases, some few Jewish mystics elaborated a new path that differs in its details from the practice of their coreligionists. In most cases, what the Kabbalists innovated were interpretations of the commandments, or customs. The resort to the term *derekh*, path, parallel or perhaps influenced by the Sufi *tariqa*, or via, is oftentimes part of this effort to forge an alternative. This does not mean that the new path was intended to dislocate the communal religious worship, but in many case the assumption is that it may sublate it. In this section we shall describe a certain meaning of the phrase *derekh ha-nevu'ah*, when it stands for "the path of prophecy." The founder of this Kabbalistic school, R. Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia (1240–c. 1291), considered himself to be a prophet and a Messiah, and he intended to disseminate his specific techniques to reach prophecy orally and in a written form.⁵⁶ The main component of his techniques is the specific forms of recitation of divine names, a practice that does not follow any halakhic prescription, though in principle a recitation of this name was rather restricted to the High Priest in the Holy of the Holiest during the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*.⁵⁷ However, the manner in which Abulafia recommended to pronounce the letters of the divine names is rather special: he proposed to combine those letters with other letters, either of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, or letters of other names of God. Thus the antagonism of those who would regard such a recitation as being transgressive would be mitigated, as indeed it happened. On the one hand, these techniques were not attacked but by very few authors and, on the other hand, they survived in many manuscripts and were adopted by other Kabbalists.

Some important parts of those techniques, especially those dealing with the letters of the divine names, were found already in the early 13th century Hasidei Ashkenaz. Other components stem from other religions, especially breathing and contemplating the inner limbs, which

⁵⁶ M. IDEL, "Defining Kabbalah: The Kabbalah of the Divine Names," in R. A. HERRERA (ed.), *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, & Typology* (New York, 1993), pp. 97-99; IDEM, "The Contribution of Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah to the Understanding of Jewish Mysticism," in P. SCHAEFER, J. DAN (eds.), *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 50 Years After* (Mohr, Tübingen, 1993), pp. 131-133, Elliot WOLFSON, *Abraham Abulafia: Kabbalist and Prophet: Hermeneutics, Theosophy and Theurgy* (Los Angeles 2000), as well as the studies referred in some of the following footnotes.

⁵⁷ See Sandra VALABREGUE-PERRY, Adam AFTERMAN, "The Utilization of Divine Names in the Temple Worship on the Day of Atonement," in *'In This Way He is to Enter into the Holy': Holiness in Time and Man* (Shalom Hartman Institute, Jerusalem 2005), pp. 125-129 (Hebrew).

stems probably from Hesychasm.⁵⁸ This is the reason I designate these techniques as anomian, which in the way I use the term, means an indifference to the *nomos* of the community as constituting a very meaningful aspect of this type of Kabbalah.⁵⁹ This does not mean that according to Abulafia the Halakhah is not important, but it is conceived of as basically significant for the vulgus, or for the organization of the society in general and much less for the spiritual life of the elite.⁶⁰ However, unlike the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists, the main religious event that Abulafia attempted to promote was not communal religious experiences, done in a quorum, and had nothing to do with the recitation of classical texts: prayer or Torah, or with performing commandments, but with recitations of combinations of divine names, done in solitude. Abulafia recommends the midnight as the best time for performing his techniques. Since there is no synchronization with the practices of the others, the techniques he proposed are performed according to choice and rhythm of the aspirant. He can do it according to his bodily or spiritual capacities, and time is not limited by external constraints. From this point of view his approach is totally different from that of the other Kabbalists. This is also the case of the need of a split of consciousness between the bodily parts of the commandments (the Halakhic aspects), and at the same time concentrate on their superstructure (the Kabbalistic aspects) that is central for the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah. In other words, the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists added a second pole to the commandments, some

form of rationales for their performance, to the Rabbinic more concrete one. Those rationales are not just some form of truths regarding God or reality, but are envisioned as explanations for the effects of the performance upon the divine sphere, achieved concomitantly with their performance. With Abulafia, however, the Kabbalist does not have to operate at the same time with two different levels of activities that stem from different sources: the Halakhic and the Kabbalistic. He first performs the techniques, than he enjoys the experience. Even his technique, which assumes three levels of dealing with letters, the written the oral and the mental, sees a hierarchy between them, with the mental as the highest. Thus, a Kabbalist can perform the techniques alone, without pronouncing one word, and be capable of attaining the highest of the religious experiences. The bodily aspects and the spiritual components of his technique are integrated issues, which have, according to the Kabbalist have one logic alone, that of inducing an ecstatic experience. Thus, for him, experience is not simultaneous to the technique or the ritual, as in the other forms of Kabbalah, but constitutes its culmination.

Nevertheless, there is a common denominator of this trend of Kabbalah and the theosophical-theurgical one. The aspirant for a mystical or prophetic experience has to combine the letters of the divine names, and this combination should be done by him while he recites them. This activity does not operate with a static center for concentration, for contemplation or meditation. Much of the energy has to be invested in controlling many variants: as it has been mentioned the precise recitation of the combinations of letters following some tonalities, mastering the breathing in a manner reminiscent of Yoga, or movements of the head and hands, corresponding to the tonalities. Thus, the performance of the technique has to do with an extraordinarily difficult enterprise, which necessitates the maximum concentration of attention on these variants. This dynamic technique does not allow a calming down of the mind, as found in other forms of mysticism related to recitation, but on the contrary, it triggers the acceleration of mental processes. From this point of view there is a phenomenological affinity between the anomian and the nomian activities on the one hand, and a very significant divergence when compared with other forms of mysticism.

Let me analyze a passage written by Abulafia in 1289 in Messina, found in the introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch:

"This knowledge should be taken by the righteous from the Torah according to its plain sense, in order to perfect his righteousness. But if he wants to become a pious man, he should approach it by means of the path of the philosophical-esoteric one. However, if he desires to prophesy, he

⁵⁸ See IDEL, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 13, 24, 35, 40, 80, 122.

⁵⁹ See, e.g., M. IDEL, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 74-75, 97-102. Recently Elliot Wolfson has questioned the very existence of anomian phenomena in Jewish spirituality in the Middle Ages. See *ibid.*, pp. 178-228, especially pp. 208-209, where he proposes the term hypernomian. However, in a series of studies I pointed to reasons why stay with the term anomian. See, e.g., Moshe IDEL, *R. Natan ben Sa'adia Harar, Le Porte Della Giustizia Sa'are Sedeq*, tr. Maurizio Mottolese (Adelphi, Milano 2001), pp. 147-173 or "On the Meaning of the term Kabbalah: Between the Ecstatic and the Sefirotic schools of Kabbalah in the 13th Century," *Pe'amim* 93 (2003), p. 51 (Hebrew), etc. It should be pointed out that either magical or astrological practices, quite widespread in the Middle Ages, are anomian, and Abulafia's techniques have many similarities to the magical ones. The entire issue requires a more elaborated analysis than it can be done here. See, e.g., M. IDEL, "Nocturnal Kabbalists," *Archaeus* 4 (2000), fasc. 3, pp. 49-74, and "Incantations, Lists, and 'Gates of Sermons' in the Circle of Rabbi Nehemiah ben Shlomo the Prophet, and their Influences," *Tarbiz* 77 (2008), pp. 499-507 (Hebrew). Ascents on high are another example, of anomian practices in the Middle Ages.

⁶⁰ See *Sitrei Torah*, ed. Amnon GROSS (Jerusalem, 2002), p. 43.

must approach it according to the "path of the names," which is the esoteric path, received from the divine intellect⁶¹ [...] If you want to be righteous alone it suffices that you will follow the paths of the Torah, on the path of its plain form [namely sense]. If you wish to arrive at being solely a pious man, it suffices that you will know the secrets of the Torah in the manner of the men of inquiry⁶², together with your being righteous. However, if you want to be prophets, it will suffice to follow the path of the prophets, whose path was to combine the [letters of the] entire Torah and to approach it by the path of the holy names, from its beginning to the end, as it reached us in a true Kabbalah regarding it [the path] that "the entire Torah is [consists] of the names of the Holy One, blessed be He,"⁶³ together with being perfect in the first two paths."⁶⁴

The overall source of all the three paths mentioned above is, according to this Kabbalist, the Torah. However, this religious document incorporates instructions for three different readers: the just men, the *tzaddiqim*, are those who extract the common way of behaviour from this text by adhering to its plain sense alone. Though not pejorative, this is quite a different attitude to righteousness in comparison to the high appreciation we have seen above in the passage of R. Ezra of Gerona. The two other paths are considered to be higher and esoteric ones: the first of these two is the philosophical esotericism, basically the Maimonidean path that deals with contemplation of nature and divine attributes, while the highest one is the path of prophecy, namely the resort to the technique of divine names, basically Abulafia's Kabbalistic system, in order to induce the experience of prophecy. The esoteric nature of the two higher paths demonstrates that something novel has been added to the common religious path. I would say that for elite figures, esoteric knowledge may intensify its religious life, conceived of as more efficacious than the common understanding of a certain religion.

⁶¹ It should be noted that the logocentric nature of the supernal intellect was attenuated in Abulafia by its identification with linguistic concepts; see e.g., M. IDEL, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, tr. Menachem Kallus (SUNY Press, Albany, 1989), pp. 22-23, 36, 40-41. Sometimes Abulafia described the Agent Intellect as primordial speech.

⁶² Namely the philosophers.

⁶³ On the Nahmanidean source of this assertion and its interpretations in Abulafia see Moshe IDEL, "Abulafia's Secrets of the Guide: A Linguistic Turn," in A. IVRI, E. R. WOLFSON, A. Arkush (eds.), *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism* (Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, 1998), pp. 306-311 (or in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 79 [1998], no. 4, pp. 495-528) and my *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 321-335.

⁶⁴ *Sefer Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, Ms. Moscow-Guenzburg 133, fols. 7b-8a. See also a very similar discussion at fol. 12b.

The recurrence of the term *path* is outstanding. Three different human ideals are imagined to be achieved by following different paths, all of which to be extracted from the same book. Thus, understanding the different paths is related to being able to read the document in at three major different ways: the performative paths are related to the existence of exegetical methods, or techniques. Let focus upon the correspondence between the exegetical path and the performative path as related to the highest ideal. The existence of an esoteric reading of the Torah as a continuum of divine names is testified by Nahmanides, a Kabbalist who mentioned an earlier magical reading of the Torah into his thought. However, while for Nahmanides this was conceived of as a lost piece of esotericism, from which only very few vestiges survived, for Abulafia and his school his was the quintessence of the religious message that is related in one way or another to a revelation from the divine intellect. Interpreting the Bible in such a way is however one thing, and pronouncing divine names as part of a technique to reach the divinity another one.

What is the relationship between the three paths according to Abulafia? According to the end of the passage, the attainment of the highest ideal implies perfect mastering of the two earlier paths. Does it mean that in order to become a prophet someone has to be at the same time a righteous and a philosopher, when he reaches the prophetic experience; or does it mean that he must pass through the two other paths in order to attain the third, which sublates the two others. Or, to put the question in a more conspicuous manner: does the prophet, when he experiences a prophetic or the ecstatic experience, also follow the two other paths concomitantly? Or are these earlier two paths only auxiliary steps, necessary to advance on the path of names, but not necessarily adequate ways of behaviour in the very moments of the application of the path of the names, and when this path culminates in an ecstatic experience, they became superfluous? If we opt for the first answer, we have a much more inclusive approach that assumes some form of consonance between all the three paths; however, if we opt for the second solution we have a much more exclusive approach.

What Abulafia's attitude was is not so clear: he uses synchronic language, though we may assume that the hierarchical relationship between the three stages was still maintained. This means that his approach consists in a preoccupation with intense immersion in the Torah, conceived of as a continuum of divine names, whose words should be

permuted and pronounced.⁶⁵ From the description of Abulafia's techniques and experiences, to be practiced in solitude, is hard to see how the commandments can be performed then. Neither is it clear how his more advanced exegetical techniques can be done while practicing the commandments. In short, the contents of Abulafia's Kabbalah represent the exegetical techniques and the divine names, conceived of as representing on the one hand the secret layer of the Torah, the New Torah, or the new revelation, on the one hand and the means for redemption on the other hand. The coexistence of the normal, plain sense Torah and that of the esoteric one is a matter of synchrony, which host together diverging approaches, reflected by the terms hidden and explained, which are conceived of as being in tension with each other. Abulafia assumes that what he conceives to be a hidden meaning cannot emerge from the fixed order of letters or words as it is. Thus, a process of deconstruction of the canonized structure of the sacred text is closely related to the emergence of a secret sense that is described as being implicit there. Given the paramount importance of the secret sense for Abulafia, the process of deconstruction of the text, done by means of the techniques that constitute the "New Torah" is also paramount for his system:

"A New Torah I innovate nowadays amongst the holy nation, it is the people of Israel, [which is] My sublime Name that is like a New Torah. And it has not been explained to My nation since the day I have hidden My face from them. And though it is a hidden name it is explained.' And then He commanded him⁶⁶ to hide no more His name from those who inquire it in truth."⁶⁷

The sense of revealing a new Torah is hardly compatible with the deep respect of the *nomos* of the Jewish communities in his period. Believing that he is a prophet and Messiah, Abulafia conceived himself also higher than Moses.⁶⁸ In fact, according to another passage from the same book, the secret sense is concealed within the plain sense in what

may be conceived as a linguistic unit, which should be deconstructed in order to extract the hidden from the plain. What is obvious in this passage is that the disclosure of the "true" divine name is tantamount to the disclosure of a New Torah, and thus Abulafia sees himself as doing it, or as commanded in a revelation to do so. However, let me remind the reader that the New Torah, or the "new" divine name, are part of the technique of reaching prophecy, namely of the resort to a technique for accelerating the mental operations.

Abulafia plays in some instances with the double meaning of the root *STR*, which may refer to both hiding and destruction.⁶⁹ This verb is quintessential for our understanding of Abulafia's esoteric message since it reflects the possibility of a contradiction and hence a strong tension, between the plain sense and the hidden one. This concomitance of plain and esoteric senses recurs also elsewhere in the same book:

"The path of our Torah [*Derekh Toratenu*] is a mixture of plain sense and concealed matters. The plain sense is useful to all who do not know the concealed aspect, for it contains traditions suited to his level of capacity, so as to guide him in this world, and to gain him his inheritance in the world to come. And the plain aspect is called Commandment, for it conveys merely the command and nothing more.⁷⁰ And the concealed aspect is called Torah for it refers to the entire body of wisdom of this commandment, its purpose and its substance. And regarding this secret level, it is written⁷¹ 'and the Torah and the commandments which I have written that you may teach them,' and it is further written⁷² 'for the commandment is a lamp and the Torah teaching is the light'; and it was said⁷³ that 'a transgression may extinguish the lamp of the commandment, but is not able to extinguish the light of Torah.'⁷⁴

The plain aspect of the Torah – the commandment – consists in the detail of the performative instruction, and is certainly found together with the hidden aspect of the commandment, called Torah too, which represents some body of secret knowledge, which may be extracted from

⁶⁵ For the report describing the intensity of the technique and the strong experience which he can hardly bear see the interesting testimony of one of the followers of Abulafia, R. Nathan ben Sa'adya, in his *Sha'arei Tzedeq*.

⁶⁶ Namely to Abulafia, who speaks about himself at a third person when he interprets the meaning of the revelations he received.

⁶⁷ *Perush Sefer ha-Haftarah*, MS. Roma-Angelica 38, fol. 37a. More on this quote and its implications see M. IDEL, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 306-307 and "Torah Hadashah – Messiah and the New Torah in Jewish Mysticism and Modern Scholarship," *Kabbalah* 21 (2009) (forthcoming).

⁶⁸ See M. IDEL, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 50-51.

⁶⁹ See, e.g., his *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, printed by A. JELLINEK, *Philosophie und Kabbala*, Erstes Heft (Leipzig, 1854), p. 14. More on this issue see M. IDEL, *Old Worlds, New Mirrors*, pp. 184-190.

⁷⁰ I perceive here some derogatory tone toward the mere performance.

⁷¹ Exodus 24:12.

⁷² Proverbs 6:23.

⁷³ BT, *Sotah*, fol. 21a.

⁷⁴ *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, Ms. Paris BN 774, fol. 125a, ed. GROSS, p. 37.

the details of the linguistic expression of that instruction.⁷⁵ The relation between the two terms: Commandment and Torah, is in my opinion similar to the relation between the Torah and the New Torah, and may be parallel to the concomitant existence of a two diametrically opposed features, as discussed by him in other instances. I would like to highlight here the very existence of the contradiction between two dimensions that are found in the sacred scriptures: the hidden and the plain. The former is understood as Torah, paralleled by metaphysics, or theology, or light, while the commandment stands for the plain sense, or the candle, or the human.⁷⁶ In my opinion, these two dimensions are paralleled, respectively, by the phrases *Sitrei Torah* and *Ta'amei Mitzvot*, the rationales of the commandments on the one hand, and *Mitzvot* the commandments themselves namely their performance, on the other hand.⁷⁷ In other words, the terms *Torah* and *Mitzvah* may be understood, at least in some instances in Abulafia's writings, as opposite or even as conflicting forms of values.

Indeed, according to another passage, for Abulafia the realm of the Torah is much less the canonized text but a technique of combining letters⁷⁸:

"It is known that both every [written] letter of the Torah, and each word of the [written] Torah, and the pronounced one, may receive several changes in [its] understanding, even more so when [interpreted] according to the paths of combinations and *gematria* 'ot and acronyms, and permutations, and exchanges, and exchanges of exchanges, and the similar [paths], because then the path will be broadened more and more, thousands and tens of thousands on each and every vowel. And no philosopher has understood and heard and knew a small and big thing about this path, the written, the oral and the mental ones. Would they know, they would not accept it unless they would reject first whatever he succeeded to understand and would 'exit out of his constellation'⁷⁹ and return to his youth to learn a new Torah [*Torah Hadashah*]. This is the reason why a Kabbalist should not wonder when someone, who did not receive the

paths of true Kabbalah⁸⁰, will deny all this since not everyone merits to gain truth, even more so this special truth, beyond whom there is no [higher] human comprehension and only by using it will God speak with his prophets, by means of the Agent Intellect."⁸¹

What is quintessential for understanding Abulafia is not just the resort to the "dangerous" concept of a New Torah, but also his assumption that the path to achieve it consists in letters rather than words. This means an atomization of the canonical text or of communicative language, which are then recombined in different manners. The feeling that such a theory will generate a protest or a condemnation, is evident in the last passage, though it occurred already much earlier in his *Sitrei Torah*.⁸² However, written in 1291, a year after the date he predicted redemption will occur⁸³, this was no more a guess but a reflection about a controversy that was running for some years with another Kabbalist and major Halakhic figure, R. Shlomo ben Abraham ibn Adret.⁸⁴ The permutation of letters is therefore one of the major ways by which Abulafia approached the sacred scriptures, and this means that the sequel of letters as found in the canonized texts is only the starting point of a radical form of exegesis, which culminates in a disintegration of the text. If for the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah the canonized text and the commandments constitute supports for the performance of the spiritual operations that accompanies them, for Abulafia the performance of the commandments may preclude the performance of his techniques, and thus indirectly also of the attainment of the highest religious experiences.

At the end of one of Abulafia's epistles written in Sicily, returns to the tripartite hierarchy of paths that has been mentioned above, when he wrote:

⁸⁰ This is presumably a critique addressed to other Kabbalists, who were critical toward his brand of Kabbalah like R. Solomon ibn Adret. Also the phrase "special truth" probably points in this direction.

⁸¹ 'Imrei Shefer, ed. Amnon GROSS (Jerusalem, 1999), p. 197.

⁸² Compare also to Abulafia's *Sitrei Torah*, pp. 37-38, and to what his student, the anonymous Kabbalist who wrote *Sefer Ner 'Elohim*, ed. Amnon GROSS (Jerusalem, 2002), p. 95.

⁸³ See my "The Time of the End": Apocalypticism and its Spiritualization in Abraham Abulafia's Eschatology," in Albert BAUMGARTEN (ed.), *Apocalyptic Time* (Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2000), pp. 155-186.

⁸⁴ See M. IDEL, "R. Shlomo ibn Adret and Abraham Abulafia: For the History of a Neglected Polemic," in D. BOYARIN et al. (eds.), *Atara L'Haim, Studies in the Talmud and Medieval Rabbinic Literature in Honor of Professor Haim Zalman Dimitrovsky* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2000), pp. 235-251 (Hebrew).

⁷⁵ For the importance in Abulafia of the linguistic formulation of a commandment over its performance see M. IDEL, "The Kabbalistic Interpretations of the Secret of 'Aryyot in Early Kabbalah," *Kabbalah* 12 (2004), pp. 158-185 (Hebrew).

⁷⁶ *Sitrei Torah*, p. 37.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷⁸ For this technique in Abulafia and related authors see e.g., Adam AFTERMAN, "Letter Permutation Techniques, Kavannah and Prayer in Jewish Mysticism," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 6 (18) (Winter 2007), pp. 52-78, WOLFSON, *Abraham Abulafia: Kabbalist and Prophet*, pp. 197-205, and M. IDEL, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 352-389.

⁷⁹ Cf. *BT, Shabbat*, fol. 156a.

"Whoever wants to come to the Temple and enter the Holy of Holies should hallow himself with the holiness of the high priest, study and teach, keep and perform [the commandments?] until he becomes perfect in his moral and intellectual capacities. And then he may isolate himself⁸⁵ in order to receive the prophetic influx from the mouth of the Almighty."⁸⁶

Commandments are therefore preparatory deeds, done before someone isolates himself in order to resort to the techniques. In the biblical and rabbinic traditions *Beit ha-miqdash*, namely the Temple in Jerusalem, and even less the Holy of Holies, are hardly conceived as being accessible to "whoever wants". This phrase betrays a tendency to popularize the meaning of one of the most exclusive places in the history of religion, and this popularization was done by means of the allegorization of the sacred place, a phenomenon evident also in other cases in Abulafia's thought.⁸⁷ Just as the High Priest is the ecstatic Kabbalist, so is his experience considered to be identical to ecstasy, for which he must prepare himself carefully. However, the details found in the ecstatic Kabbalah are dramatically different from the descriptions of the ancient Jewish High Priest. Abulafia drastically reinterpreted the nature of both the High Priest, and of the Temple, in order to open the gate for a more comprehensive mystical experience, which he identified as more intellectual, messianic and redemptive.⁸⁸ However, this is not just a matter of interpretation: Specific place and time, as well as the priestly identity of the mystic, and to a great extent also the divine name, that is pronounced only by its combinations with other letters, are now obliterated.

⁸⁵ *Yitboded*. This verb can be understood also as mental concentration.

⁸⁶ *Matzref la-Kesef*, Ms. Sasoon 56, fol. 34a, in ed. Amnon GROSS (Jerusalem, 2001), p. 23. See also M. IDEL, *Messianic Mystics* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1998), pp. 96-97.

⁸⁷ M. IDEL, "R. Shlomo ibn Aderet and Abraham Abulafia," pp. 238-240.

⁸⁸ On the Holy of the Holiest in Jewish mysticism see Gershom SCHOLEM, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Schocken Books, New York, 1967), p. 379, n. 9, WOLFSON, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 20-22. See also *Philo of Alexandria*, tr. and intr. David Winston (Paulist Press, New York, 1981), p. 254. See also Joshua FINKEL, "The Guise and Vicissitudes of a Universal Folk-Belief in Jewish and Greek Tradition," *Harry Austryn Wolfson, Jubilee Volume English Section* (Jerusalem, 1965), vol. I, pp. 236-240, 242-243, where the possible relationship between Midrashic literature and Philo on the entrance in the Holy of the Holiest was dealt with. On the ecstatic experience of the High Priest in Philo see also Mareen R. NIEHOFF, "What is a Name? Philo's Mystical Philosophy of Language," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2 (1995), pp. 232-233, and now the very important contribution to the topic by M. SCHNEIDER, *The Appearance of the High Priest*.

As part of this reinterpretation, also holiness receives another meaning. Unlike the Rabbinic vision of the unique status of the High Priest Abulafia believes that someone may share his "holiness" a view that I see as the attainment of the unction with the supernal intellectual influx which triggers the ecstatic experience.⁸⁹ Thus, the most restricted and elitist type of holiness, that of the high priest, according to Rabbinic Judaism, has been reinterpreted by the ecstatic Kabbalist in order to point to an experience that is attainable in principle to almost everyone, if he resorts to a certain technique of reciting divine names. What is the precise relationship between holiness and the ecstatic experience according to Abulafia? The concept of holiness occurs in his thought together with ritualistic matters, apparently performance of commandments that are intended to bring someone to some form of perfection. It is only afterwards, that the mystic should isolate himself, in order to receive the prophetic influx. The ritualistic actions, including what is called hallowing, is therefore, a preparatory step and it is only the state of seclusion that is an essential component in the technique for attaining the ecstatic experience. Seclusion, unlike the preparatory steps, belongs to what I call an anomian practice, and the mystical experience is conditioned ultimately by the anomian act of retreat from society. In Abulafia's Kabbalah, the retreat in a special isolated room is accompanied, as in the case of the high priest, by the pronunciation of the divine name, an anomian or even antinomian practice according to rabbinic Judaism.⁹⁰ Indeed, Abulafia's treatment of the divine name, in his *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, refers to the functions of this name "to turn the sages wiser, and to bring the influx to the illuminati."⁹¹ The influx mentioned here is the intellectual outpouring stemming from the higher intellects upon the human one. Wisdom is therefore, the aim, while the ritual is not mentioned. In short, Abulafia shaped a new aim for a heightened religious life in the present, which is the attainment of an intellectual type of prophecy. For this purpose he designed techniques based upon quite intense exercises, intended to accelerate the mental processes.

5. East European Hasidism and the Intensification of Religious Life

Since mid-18th century, a major development in Jewish mysticism took place, known as Hasidism became visible in some parts of Eastern Europe. This is a revivalist movement that draws heavily from a

⁸⁹ M. IDEL, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 76.

⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 22-24.

⁹¹ Ed. Amnon GROSS (Jerusalem 2002), p. 3.

variety of Kabbalistic literatures, but introduces forcefully a new term that is pertinent for our discussion here: *'Avodah be-Gashmiyyut*.⁹² This phrase means that someone can worship God also by means of the corporeal deeds, which are not necessarily part of the rabbinic system of commandments. The new emphasis comes together with a renewed stress on the importance of the spiritual processes, basically emotional, like enthusiasm [*hitlahavut*] or devotion [*deveikus*], and we may speak about moving to extremes in both cases. Moreover, the omnipresence of God, which is one of the most important models introduced by R. Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, may reflect an approach that is less concerned with insisting on distinctions than it was the case of the Kabbalists.⁹³ Those relatively new elements nonetheless, in Hasidism we find numerous examples of the need of performance of commandments as part of spiritual experience. Especially prominent is the intensification of prayer, indeed an ecstatic form of prayer that is the landmark of the contribution of the founder of Hasidism, the Besht.⁹⁴ Let adduce one single example from the traditions reported to the Besht:

"Concerning that which is written in the *Zohar*, that man is judged in each [supernal] palace, this is to be [viewed as dealing with] speeches and pronounced letters of prayer, which are called palaces, wherein a man is judged, whether he is worthy of entering the pronounced letters of the prayer. If he is unworthy, he is cast out, i.e., an alien thought is sent to him, and he is pushed away [...] from the [pronounced] letters, which are the palaces."⁹⁵

The feeling that one is judged by each of the sounds he pronounces is putting an incredible onus on the worshipper: he must be careful to pronounce each and every sound without the intrusion of alien thought.

⁹² See the comprehensive monograph on the topic by Tsippi KAUFFMAN, *In All Your Ways Know Him: The Concept of God and the Avodah be-Gashmiyyut in Early Stages of Hasidism* (Bar Ilan University Press, Ramat Gan, 2009) (Hebrew).

⁹³ See M. IDEL, "The Land of Israel as Divine Vitality: *'Eretz Israel* in Hasidic Thought," in Aviezer RAVITZKY (ed.), *The Land of Israel in Modern Jewish Thought* (Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, Jerusalem, 1998), pp. 256-275 (Hebrew).

⁹⁴ See M. IDEL, "Models of Understanding Prayer in Early Hasidism."

⁹⁵ *Keter Shem Tov* (Brooklyn 1987) part, II, fol. 56ab, translated by Louis JACOBS, *Hasidic Prayer* (Schocken Books, New York, 1978), pp. 77-78, and *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'akov*, ed. R. SHATZ-UFFENHEIMER (Magnes Press, Jerusalem 1976), pp. 13-14, 81. Let me point out that the view of the Besht, that each and every letter, namely sound, of the prayer and the Torah comprise "divinity, worlds and souls" and constitute the vehicle for the ascent of the soul, is another major example of intensification of performance for the sake of contact.

R. Dov Baer, known as the Great Maggid of Medziretch, one of the first and most influential masters of Hasidism, interprets the Talmudic passage concerning God's phylacteries in a rather remarkable manner:

"What⁹⁶ is written in the phylacteries of the Master of the world? [It is written]⁹⁷ 'And who is like the people of Israel, a singular nation on the earth.' It is written in the works of Isaac Luria⁹⁸ that the phylacteries are called brains [*mohin*] – that is, brains, called delight and enthusiasm – by which we are united to Him, be He blessed and praised.⁹⁹ 'And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord,' as if you are called by the name of the Lord, blessed be He, since you become one unity with him, and this delight¹⁰⁰ is called our phylacteries. And His delight, blessed be He, in which he delights because we are united to Him, be He blessed, is called His phylacteries. 'And who is like the people of Israel, a singular nation' – as they reach a state of unity which transcends number, but the number is under their control (...) for time is under their control to do whatever they want, as they transcend time. And He, blessed be He, is united to us, the only obstacle being our capacity, as it is written:¹⁰¹ 'Turn to me, [says the Lord of hosts], and I will return to you,' as He, Blessed be he, dwells in the thought. And when a person thinks futile things, he pushes Him away [as it is written],¹⁰² 'And Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting.' As the cloud was dwelling on him, the Mind cannot dwell on man, since darkness dwells in him."¹⁰³

Here we have another instance of isomorphism: both the Jewish males and God don phylacteries. However, according to the Hasidic master this is not just a matter of routine performance: The term "mind" is a veiled reference to God, Who is alluded to earlier in this context in the following way: "As if when we perform worthy acts the world of the

⁹⁶ *BT. Berakhot*, fol. 6a.

⁹⁷ *I Chronicles* 17:21.

⁹⁸ See *Peri 'Etz Hayyim*, Gate of Tefillin, passim.

⁹⁹ *Deut.* 28:10. This verse is written in the common phylacteries, which are referred to below as "our phylacteries."

¹⁰⁰ The term *Ta'anug* recurs several times in this passage, and is characteristic of Hasidic vision of theurgy. The ideal of causing the delight of God by performing the Jewish rituals is paramount in this literature and reflects the transformation of rabbinic and theosophical theurgy. See M. IDEL, "*Ta'anug*: Erotic Delights from Kabbalah to Hasidism," in Wouter J. HANEGRAAFF, Jeffrey J. KRIPAL (eds.), *Hidden Intercourses: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism* (Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2009), pp. 111-151.

¹⁰¹ *Zechariah* 1:3.

¹⁰² *Exodus* 40:35.

¹⁰³ *'Or ha-'Emmet* (Bnei Barak, 1969), fol. 8a.

mind, blessed be He, is broadening. Therefore, the divine mind dwells in our thought, this state being regarded as one of union."¹⁰⁴ In the Hasidic passage there is another form of simultaneity, one between the human and the divine acts of thought. They presuppose a Neoaristotelian psychology and theology, as found in some of the followers of Maimonides, Abulafia among them, though the Neoaristotelian stand has been interpreted here theurgically: the human activity is conceived of as broadening the divine consciousness. The concepts used by the Great Maggid forcefully point to a description of an experience, which may be designated as *unio mystica*. The type of cleaving described in this passage transcends the mere connection between two units since, in the end, they achieve a union passing beyond unity, an attribute reserved in medieval source for God alone.

However, what is evident here is the importance of corporeal acts and objects that both generate the intellectual union, and convey it. By performing commandments the Hasidic master imagines that he induces delight within the divine realm on the one hand, and this delight and union between the human and the divine, is allegorized by the donning of the phylacteries, an object that is purely ritualistic. Thus we have the polarity of the bodily performance, namely the donning of the phylacteries, and the mental activity related to it, understood as having an impact on the divine sphere as mind. It is possible that the phylacteries are understood as an expansion of the brain or the head, and thus their donning are an allegory of the expansion of the divine mind. What is especially significant in this passage is the fact that union with God is depending solely on the human activity, God being prepared to unite with the people of Israel all the time. Thus, responsibility is now put on man, and divine will plays only a small role in initiating it.

Let me turn to a main disciple of the Great Maggid, R. Shneur Zalman of Liady, the founder of the Lubavitch Hasidic school. In his classical *Sefer ha-Tanya*, written at the end of the 18th century he wrote:

"To understand how the reader of the stories of deeds, [that are found] in the Torah [*Sippurei ma'asiyyot she-ba-Torah*] is connected to the Life of the World,¹⁰⁵ according to what is written in [the book of] *Kavvanot*, fol. 16b, [you should know that] just as man is preoccupied here below [with the Torah], so is the configuration of the supernal man on the high, etc., and so it is [the case] insofar as the rumination [*hirhurim*] on the written letters [is concerned]. However, regarding the utterance, it should be said that it cuts a path through and ascends to the [world of] Emanation itself, or to the [world of] Creation by the means of intellectual Awe and Love,

or to [the world of] Formation, by means of natural Awe and Love, and by means of the *Miqra'* it ascends from this world to the ten *sefirot* of Making, because it cuts off the airs etc.¹⁰⁶ This is, [however] not the case insofar as rumination is concerned, which [affects] but the [supernal] configuration, which is the root of his soul etc. And what is written in the *Zohar* III, fol. 105¹⁰⁷ that rumination does not affect anything (...) the thought remains there and adds there a great light, by the addition and the multiplicity of the light within [the world of] Emanation by means of the *Miqra'* and the practical commandments in [the world of] Making. The quintessence of the unification is on the high, but its fruits [alone] refract on the lower world, by means of the drawing of a little bit of light downwards, by means of utterance and deeds, this not being the case of rumination, which does not draw down anything."¹⁰⁸

The term *Miqra'*, which means both the Hebrew Bible and loud reading or calling, and in some case conjuring, occurs twice in this passage, and it is important for the understanding of the passage as a whole. Performance of the *Miqra'* is the instrument for the ascent to the first, i.e. the lowest of the four worlds characteristic of later Kabbalah. From this point of view, it is certainly not the most sublime of religious acts. However, it alone ensures the effective connection between human needs and the supernal energy that can facilitate their attainment. According to this passage the essence of religious attainment is not magical but theurgical the former being but a secondary benefit. More abstract study of the Torah reaches the stage of the highest world, but more mundane needs are achieved by means of more material acts. The synthesis between the magical and the mystical moments, which was more organic in the writings of R. Shneur Zalman's predecessors, is less visible in his own thought. The initiator of a much more intellectualistic trend in Hasidism, he remains more faithful to the medieval axiology found in the writings of the philosophers as to the superiority of thought over deeds. However, it is only the performance of the ritual that is capable to bring down supernal influx upon the operator, though his thought is capable to enhance the supernal realm, in a manner reminiscent of R. Ezra of Gerona's passage adduced above.

¹⁰⁶ This is a topos in Kabbalistic literature, which assumes that some Psalmic recitations are paving the way for the ascent of prayer, by removing the inimical powers that obstruct this ascent.

¹⁰⁷ Indeed, in *Zohar*, vol. III, fol. 105a, there is a view that ruminations do not affect anything in the supernal world because they do not ascend.

¹⁰⁸ *Tanya*, *Quntres Aharon*, fol. 153ab. See also M. IDEL, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 158-159.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 5c.

¹⁰⁵ Namely how the reader is linked to God.

R. Menahem Mendel of Rymanow, is reported to have claimed that the New Torah is that Torah that will include the stories – the Hebrew term used is *ma'asiyyot* – concerning the Besht and his disciples:

"Behold that the Besht and his holy disciples [...] radiated their light onto the world even without speeches and words, [but] by their paths [namely behaviour] and [even] solely by their silence they enlightened and aroused the hearts of the children of Israel to awe and love of God, blessed be He. And their paths and moves are all holy and they constitute a Torah to teach by it the worship of God, Blessed be He, to those who are adhering to Him. And the words of the holy rabbi, our master M[endel] of Rymanow – may his merits safeguard us – on the verse 'A New Torah will go forth from Me' that [it refers] to a time when the deeds of the holy disciples of the Besht will be designated as Torah, and will bless then [the blessing] 'He gives the Torah'¹⁰⁹ as it is done in the case of a portion in the Torah."¹¹⁰

"Paths" and "moves" in the first part of the passage are paralleled by "deeds" in the second part. The whole idea is to assert that even the non-halakhic behaviour of the founder of Hasidism and his disciples will become canonized as the Pentateuch. The religious behaviour of the Besht and his disciples is conceived now as a new, extended religious paradigm. His actions, which might appear to be mundane affairs, even his silence, are very significant. The mentioning of silence is quite important since it serves as an indication for the efficacy of the speech-acts. This is again an example of the expansion of the significant act, which intensifies the life of the mystic. I would prefer to relate to this approach as hypernomian, which means that the *nomos* is expanded to other forms of activities, which are hallowed. In the passage, just as in the previous one, the term *ma'asiyyot* occurs as central. It stands for two different and nevertheless related topics: one is stories, the other one is deeds. In other words, legends about the deeds of holy figures in the immediate past may become part of the stories to be included in a new Torah. In fact the legend about Enoch discussed above, had an illustrious career in Hasidism. Let me point out that unlike Abulafia's declaration that he will reveal and new Torah, here the assumption is that the Besht's behaviour will be added to the existing Torah. While for the ecstatic Kabbalist the focus is the acceleration of mental activities and the

¹⁰⁹ This is the blessing pronounced after the reading of the portion of the Torah.

¹¹⁰ Cf. the more recent collection of Hasidic teachings entitled *Millei de-Avot*, compiled by R. Menahem Mendel Viznitzer (Benei Beraq, 1981), pp. 9-10, 143, where a certain *Sefer 'Imrei Hayyim* belonging to the Viznitz Hasidic school, has been cited, fol. 72b, Parashat Shoftim, where the early 19th century R. Menahem Mendel of Rymanow's view is quoted.

attainments of revelations, for the Hasidic master it is an expanded mode of behaviour, which does not invalidate the Halakhic one.

At the beginning of the 19th century, a follower of R. Levi Isaac of Berditchev, an important Hasidic master, asserted that:

"the letters of the name of each and every *Tzaddiq* are little channels which receive the effluvia and bring the effluvia downwards. This is the reason for the fact that when someone cares for the names of the *Tzaddiqim* written in the Torah, like Adam, Seth, Enoch, Metushalem and Noah and understands which was the aspect of the divinity which that righteous worshipped and he also worships God in such a way, in holiness, cleanness and awe, he will be able to draw down upon himself that holiness and intellectual apprehensions which [belong] to that righteous, by means of his name, which is the channel of the effluvia."¹¹¹

Here the assumption is that even the pre-Mosaic behaviour of the ancient forefathers has been conceived of as being religiously essential, and that their very names are understood as effective, enabling someone to reach the experience of those figures.¹¹²

These examples point to the fact that not only has the regular performance of the commandments been conceived of as efficacious, but also forms of behaviour that differ from the rabbinic precepts. Thus, not only the moments of obedience of the specifics of deeds conceived of as the *nomos* according to the Rabbinic writings, but in fact a variety of other experiences are conceived of as equally important. This means that almost any act, provided that it has been performed out of devotion or enthusiasm, may become religiously important, an approach which I consider to be an intensification of the religious life.

6. Some Conclusions

In the three different versions of Jewish mysticism discussed above, there is an interesting common denominator: performance, even when it has to do with spiritual processes, emotional, or mental, have strong corporeal starting points. The performance of the commandments in theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, the loud recitations of letters, acts of rhythmic breathing, movements of hands and head in ecstatic Kabbalah, and what is called worship by corporeality in Hasidism and the relative

¹¹¹ R. Aharon of Zhitomir, *Toledot 'Aharon* (Lemberg, 1865), part I, fol. 5c.

¹¹² See the important monograph dealing with major aspects of this topic Arthur GREEN, *Devotion and Commandment, The Faith of Abraham in the Hasidic Imagination* (Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 1989).

greater importance of feelings related to limbs in this literature, are reflecting this intensification.¹¹³ This occurrence of the importance of the body on the ground of the centrality of performance reflects the biblical-Rabbinic anthropology that did not operate with the Greek/Hellenistic dualism of body versus soul.¹¹⁴ This dualism, however, was introduced in Judaism in a significant manner in Philon of Alexandria and again, since the 10th century, in some Jewish Neoplatonic philosophers like Isaac Israeli, Shlomo ibn Gabirol or Abraham ibn Ezra, and then adopted by many Kabbalists. Also Maimonides's view is based on such a duality, though his thought stems from the Neoaristotelian, not the Neoplatonic school. Abraham Abulafia, who followed him to a great extent, nevertheless resorts to bodily movements as part of the technique, and describes experiences of anointment at the peak of the mystical experience.

However, together with the substantial adoption of these forms of anthropological dualism, the importance of the bodily components in the performative aspects of Kabbalah and Hasidism, represent the lingering of the earlier Jewish anthropologies, even after the revolution introduced by the Jewish philosophers. This does not mean that there are no important instances when the dualism has been accepted in a more dramatic manner in Kabbalah. Certainly there are, especially given the Neoplatonic influence. However, at least in the cases in which some forms of techniques have been accepted, the body has been given a more significant role as an instrument rather than as an aim.

Let me distinguish between the various attitudes toward commandments in the three forms of Jewish mysticism mentioned above. For the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists, the commandments are sacramental acts, namely actions to be performed carefully, sometimes out of love and awe, as they say, and without the act of performance its maximum efficacy cannot be achieved. For Abulafia, however, the rationales of the commandments are important from the Kabbalistic point of view, namely we are speaking about views that can be extracted from their linguistic formulation in the Bible, and much less from their actual performance. For the later Hasidic masters, however, the emotional attitude is as important as the performance, though the spectrum of Hasidic attitudes to performance is much wider.

The Kabbalistic literature is dominantly an exegetical one. This means that much of what Kabbalists write are either direct forms of interpretations, or oblique ones, since the traditional literatures informed much of those discussions, even when the literary genre is not exegetical. One may ask to what extent those exegetical discussions indeed reflect actual experiences or constitute just casuistic deliberations. Indeed, it is difficult to answer such a question in a definite manner, and I wonder whether one single answer holds for all the texts. One thing, however, seems to be self-evident: most of the Kabbalists writing about the performance of commandments and their significance, perhaps all of them, did indeed perform those commandments. This means that independent of the ontological existence of the theosophical structure or the reality of the theurgical impact, performance has been a routine issue. We may assume that also the theosophical-theurgical *imaginaire* was in the mind or in the imagination of those who belong to this type of Kabbalah, while they were performing the commandments. There is no way to validate the other claims as to the efficacy of the performance. We nevertheless may assume that the activation of some limbs as part of this performance induced no doubt some form of experience, even more so when the strong belief that such a deed has an impact on the supernal world. However, as seen above, those Kabbalists who engaged in acts that I describe as constituting the mystical-magical model, were interested in causing the circulation of energy, and believed that they may have an impact of reality. In other words, they were also connected to the concept of power.¹¹⁵ This is also the case in Hasidism, but the emphasis is there more on the expanding the realm of the significant activities, which turns life, not only rituals, as an occasion for a sacramental activity. However, in the case of ecstatic Kabbalah, the rare moments of spiritual elation are special instances basically during night and quite unrelated to the community as they took place in solitude, and they represent the spiritual achievement of the individuals.

Let me draw attention to the fact that both in ecstatic Kabbalah and in East European Hasidism – though also in another way in the Heikhalot literature – authors mention the danger of death during the mystical experience. This is an interesting indication as to their assumption of the intensity of their experience.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ See M. IDEL, "Models of Understanding Prayer in Early Hasidism," p. 76.

¹¹⁴ M. IDEL, "On The Performing Body in Theosophical-Theurgical Kabbalah: Some Preliminary Remarks," in M. DIEMLING, G. VELTRI (eds.), *The Jewish Body, Corporeality, Society, and Identity in the Renaissance and Early Modern Period* (Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2009), pp. 251-271.

¹¹⁵ On the role of power in Kabbalah see the monograph of J. GARB, *Manifestations of Power*.

¹¹⁶ For mystical death in Jewish mysticism see M. IDEL, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 128-131, Elliot R. WOLFSON, "Weeping, Death and Spiritual Ascent in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Mysticism," in J. J. COLLINS, Michael FISHBANE (eds.), *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys* (SUNY

Most of the Kabbalists, especially the theosophical-theurgical ones, regarded themselves as powerful agents, both because of their theory of the divinity of the soul¹¹⁷ and because of their being in possession of powerful forms of behaviour that they perform. Abulafia believed that he was a prophet and Messiah and he acted as such. The Besht believed that he had supernal powers, not only to heal, but to change the course of history and had even some form of messianic aspirations. The theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists believed that their religious deeds have an immediate impact on the divine sphere. Each in his ways intensified religious life in search for a stronger contact with the spiritual world. They would only rarely subscribe to the description of their medieval contemporaries in the Christian world, as offered by C. S. Lewis:

"Our highest privilege is to imitate it¹¹⁸ in such measure as we can. The Medieval Model is, if we may use the word, anthropoperipheral. We are creatures of the Margin."¹¹⁹

Press, Albany, 1995), pp. 207-243, Michael FISHBANE, *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* (University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1994), and again more recently M. IDEL, *R. Menahem Recanati, the Kabbalist* (Schocken, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, 1998), vol. I, pp. 142-150 (Hebrew), and "Models of Understanding Prayer in Early Hasidism," pp. 100-101.

¹¹⁷ M. IDEL, "Nishmat 'Eloha: On the Divinity of the Soul in Nahmanides and His Schools," in S. ARZY, M. FACHLER, B. KAHANA (eds.), *Life as a Midrash, Perspectives in Jewish Psychology* (Yediy'ot Aharonot, Tel Aviv, 2004), pp. 338-380 (Hebrew).

¹¹⁸ The celestial dance as described by Chalcidius, the interpreter of Plato.

¹¹⁹ *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1967), p. 58. See also Arthur O. LOVEJOY, *The Great Chain of Being, A Study of the History of an Idea* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1976), pp. 101-102.